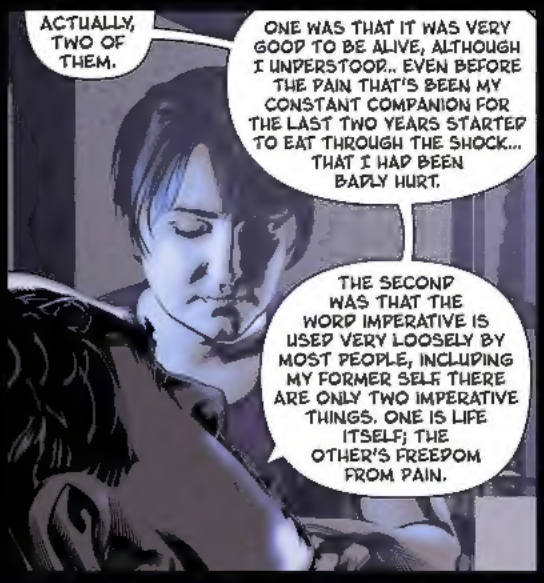
LITTLE GREEN
GOD OF AGONY

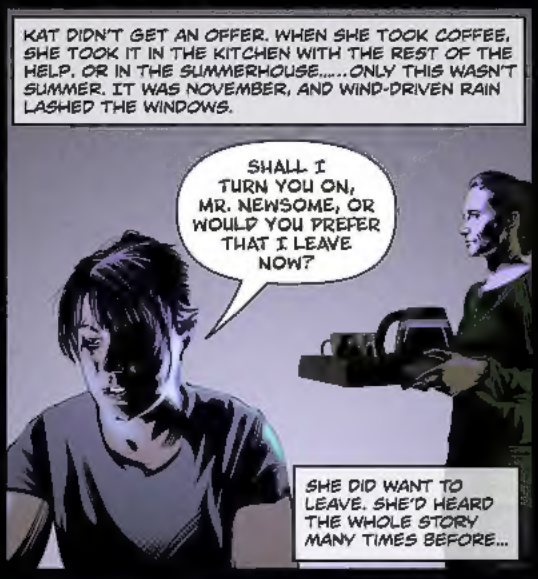
THE HOME OF ANDREW NEWSOME, SIXTH RICHEST MAN IN THE WORLD...
I WAS IN AN ACCIDENT.
ACTUALLY, I CAUSED THE ACCIDENT.
NOT SO TIGHT, KAT, PLEASE.
KATHERINE MACDONALD, NEWSOME'S PRIVATE NURSE COULD HAVE POINTED OUT, AS SHE DID AT THE START, THAT THE TENS LOST THEIR EFFICACY IF THEY WEREN'T TIGHT TO THE OUTRAGED NERVES THEY WERE SUPPOSED TO SOOTHE. BUT SHE WAS A FAST LEARNER. SHE LOOSENED THE VELCRO STRAP A LITTLE, THINKING...
THE PILOT TOLD YOU THERE WERE THUNDERSTORMS IN THE OMAHA AREA.
THE PILOT TOLD ME THERE WERE THUNDERSTORMS IN THE AREA.
SHE HAD HEARD IT ALL BEFORE, AS HAD JENSEN, NEWSOME'S PERSONAL ASSISTANT...
BUT IT WAS THE MAN STANDING NEXT TO JENSEN WHO INTERESTED HER--
BUT I TOLD HIM IT WAS IMPERATIVE THAT I MAKE THAT MEETING.

HIS NAME WAS RIDEOUT.
SO FAR RIDEOUT HADN'T SAID A WORD, BUT SHE DIDN'T NEED HER EARS TO KNOW WHAT HE WAS. THE WHIFF OF CHARLATAN WAS STRONG ABOUT HIM. IN FIFTEEN YEARS AS A NURSE SPECIALIZING IN PAIN PATIENTS, SHE HAD MET HER SHARE. AT LEAST THIS ONE WASN'T WEARING ANY CRYSTALS.
AS I LAY ON THE RUNWAY IN THE RAIN AMONG THE BURNING PIECES OF A FOURTEEN MILLION DOLLAR AIRCRAFT, MOST OF THE CLOTHES TORN OFF MY BODY... THAT'LL HAPPEN WHEN YOU HIT PAVEMENT AND ROLL FIFTY OR SIXTY FEET...
...I HAD A REVELATION.

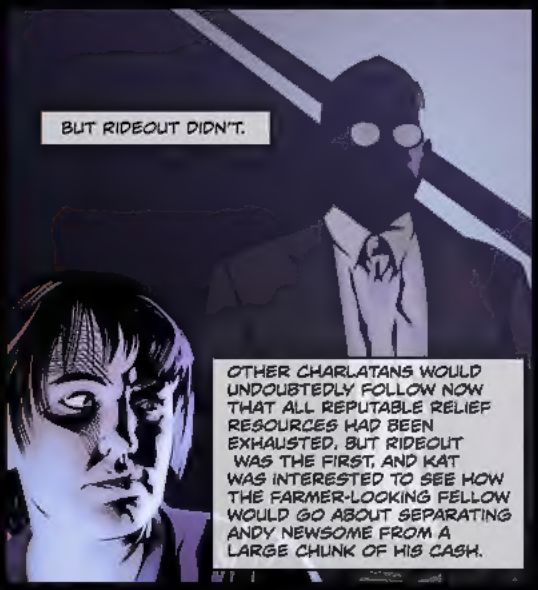

ACTUALLY, TWO OF THEM.
ONE WAS THAT IT WAS VERY GOOD TO BE ALIVE, ALTHOUGH I UNDERSTOOD.. EVEN BEFORE THE PAIN THAT'S BEEN MY CONSTANT COMPANION FOR THE LAST TWO YEARS STARTED TO EAT THROUGH THE SHOCK... THAT I HAD BEEN BADLY HURT.
THE SECOND WAS THAT THE WORD IMPERATIVE IS USED VERY LOOSELY BY MOST PEOPLE, INCLUDING MY FORMER SELF. THERE ARE ONLY TWO IMPERATIVE THINGS. ONE IS LIFE ITSELF; THE OTHER'S FREEDOM FROM PAIN.

DO YOU AGREE, REVEREND RIDEOUT?
NOT SO GODDAM TIGHT, KAT! HOW MANY TIMES DO I HAVE TO TELL YOU?

SORRY.
WHY DO I EVEN TRY?
WOULD YOU GENTLEMEN LIKE SOME COFFEE?
MELISSA, THE HOUSEKEEPER...


KAT DIDN'T GET AN OFFER. WHEN SHE TOOK COFFEE, SHE TOOK IT IN THE KITCHEN WITH THE REST OF THE HELP. OR IN THE SUMMERHOUSE.....ONLY THIS WASN'T SUMMER. IT WAS NOVEMBER, AND WIND-DRIVEN RAIN LASHED THE WINDOWS.
SHALL I TURN YOU ON, MR. NEWSOME, OR WOULD YOU PREFER THAT I LEAVE NOW?
SHE DID WANT TO LEAVE. SHE'D HEARD THE WHOLE STORY MANY TIMES BEFORE...

THE IMPERATIVE MEETING, THE CRASH, HOW ANDREW NEWSOME HAD BEEN EJECTED FROM THE BURNING PLANE, ABOUT THE BROKEN BONES, CHIPPED SPINE, AND DISLOCATED NECK, MOST OF ALL ABOUT THE TWENTY-FOUR MONTHS OF UNRELIEVED SUFFERING, WHICH HE WOULD SOON GET TO-AND IT BORED HER.


BUT RIDEOUT DIDN'T.
OTHER CHARLATANS WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY FOLLOW NOW THAT ALL REPUTABLE RELIEF RESOURCES HAD BEEN EXHAUSTED, BUT RIDEOUT WAS THE FIRST, AND KAT WAS INTERESTED TO SEE HOW THE FARMER-LOOKING FELLOW WOULD GO ABOUT SEPARATING ANDY NEWSOME FROM A LARGE CHUNK OF HIS CASH.

GO AHEAD, HONEY, TURN ME ON.
ONCE THE LECHERY MIGHT HAVE BEEN REAL (KAT THOUGHT MELISSA MIGHT HAVE INFORMATION ON THAT SUBJECT), BUT NOW IT WAS JUST A PAIR OF SHAGGY EYEBROWS WORKING ON MUSCLE MEMORY.
PROPERLY ATTACHED, THE TENS UNITS WOULD HAVE SENT A WEAK ELECTRICAL CURRENT INTO NEWSOME'S MUSCLES, A THERAPY THAT SEEMED TO HAVE SOME AMELIORATIVE EFFECTS...ALTHOUGH NO ONE COULD SAY EXACTLY WHY, OR IF THEY WERE ENTIRELY OF THE PLACEBO VARIETY.
BE THAT AS IT MAY, THEY WOULD DO NOTHING FOR NEWSOME TONIGHT. HOOKED UP AS LOOSELY AS THEY WERE, THEY HAD BEEN REDUCED TO THE EQUIVALENT OF JOY-BUZZERS. EXPENSIVE ONES.
SHALL I—?
STAY! THERAPY!
THE LORD WOUNDED IN BATTLE COMMANDS... AND I OBEY.
HE TOLD THEM ABOUT AWAKENING IN A CAGE OF METAL AND MESH.
THERE WERE STEEL GANTRIES CALLED FIXATORS ON BOTH LEGS AND ONE ARM TO IMMOBILIZE JOINTS THAT HAD BEEN REPAIRED WITH "ABOUT A HUNDRED" STEEL PINS (ACTUALLY SEVENTEEN; KAT HAD SEEN THE X-RAYS).
THE FIXATORS WERE ANCHORED IN THE OUTRAGED AND SPLINTERED FEMURS, TIBIAE, FIBULAE, HUMERUS, RADIUS, ULNA. HIS BACK WAS ENCASED IN A KIND OF CHAIN MAIL GIRDLE THAT WENT FROM HIS HIPS TO THE NAPE OF HIS NECK.
HE TALKED ABOUT SLEEPLESS NIGHTS THAT SEEMED TO GO ON NOT FOR HOURS BUT FOR YEARS. HE TALKED ABOUT THE CRUSHING HEADACHES.
HE TOLD THEM ABOUT HOW EVEN WIGGLING HIS TOES CAUSED PAIN ALL THE WAY UP TO HIS JAW, AND THE SHRIEKING AGONY THAT BIT INTO HIS LEGS WHEN THE DOCTORS INSISTED THAT HE MOVE THEM--FIXATORS AND ALL--SO HE WOULDN'T ENTIRELY LOSE THEIR FUNCTION.
HE TOLD THEM ABOUT THE BEDSORES AND HOW HE BIT BACK HOWLS OF HURT AND OUTRAGE WHEN THE NURSES ATTEMPTED TO ROLL HIM ON HIS SIDE SO THE SORES COULD BE FLUSHED OUT.

THERE HAVE BEEN ANOTHER DOZEN OPERATIONS IN THE LAST TWO YEARS.

ACTUALLY, KAT KNEW THERE HAD BEEN FIVE, TWO OF THOSE TO REMOVE THE FIXATORS WHEN THE BONES WERE SUFFICIENTLY HEALED.

UNLESS YOU INCLUDED THE MINOR PROCEDURE TO RESET HIS BROKEN FINGERS, THAT IS. THEN YOU COULD SAY THERE WERE SIX, BUT I DON'T CONSIDER SURGICAL STUFF NECESSITATING NO MORE THAN LOCAL ANESTHETIC TO BE "OPERATIONS."

IF THAT WAS THE CASE, SHE'D HAD A DOZEN HERSELF, MOST OF THEM WHILE LISTENING TO MUZAK IN A DENTIST'S CHAIR.

NOW COMES THE PROMISES, THAT COMES NEXT.

THE DOCTORS PROMISED ME THE PAIN WOULD ABATE.

REVEREND RIDEOUT, THOSE WERE FALSE PROMISES.

I HAVE ALMOST NO FLEXION IN MY KNEES AT ALL, AND THE PAIN IN MY HIPS AND BACK IS BEYOND DESCRIPTION.

THE DOCTORS-

-AH! OH! STOP, KAT, STOP!

LET IT GO DOWN! *LET IT DOWN*, GODDAMMIT!

TEN DEGREES. POSSIBLY TWELVE. WHOOP-DE-DO. SOMETIMES SHE GOT IT ALL THE WAY TO FIFTEEN-AND THE LEFT LEG, WHICH WAS A LITTLE BETTER, TO TWENTY DEGREES OF FLEX-BEFORE HE STARTED HOLLERING LIKE A KID WHO SEES A HYPODERMIC NEEDLE IN A SCHOOL NURSE'S HAND.

THE DOCTORS GUILTY OF FALSE PROMISES HAD NOT BEEN GUILTY OF FALSE ADVERTISING; THEY HAD TOLD HIM THE PAIN WAS COMING. KAT HAD BEEN THERE AS A SILENT ONLOOKER DURING SEVERAL OF THOSE CONSULTATIONS.

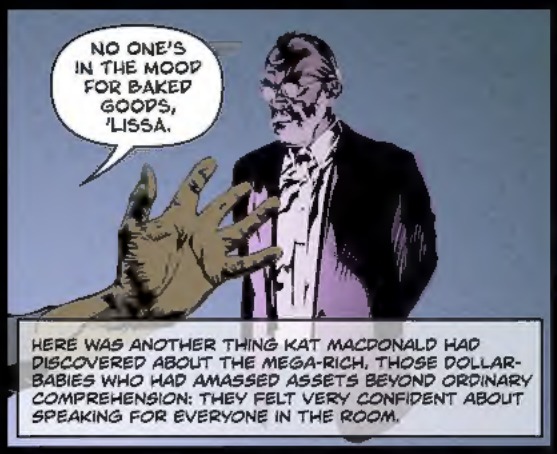
THEY HAD TOLD HIM HE WOULD SWIM IN PAIN BEFORE THOSE CRUCIAL TENDONS, SHORTENED BY THE ACCIDENT AND FROZEN IN PLACE BY THE FIXATORS, STRETCHED OUT AND ONCE AGAIN BECAME LIMBER.

HE WOULD HAVE PLENTY OF PAIN BEFORE HE WAS ABLE TO GET THE BEND IN HIS KNEES BACK TO NINETY DEGREES. BEFORE HE WOULD BE ABLE TO SIT IN A CHAIR OR BEHIND THE WHEEL OF A CAR, THAT WAS. THE SAME WAS TRUE OF HIS BACK AND HIS NECK.

THE ROAD TO RECOVERY LED THROUGH THE LAND OF PAIN, THAT WAS ALL.

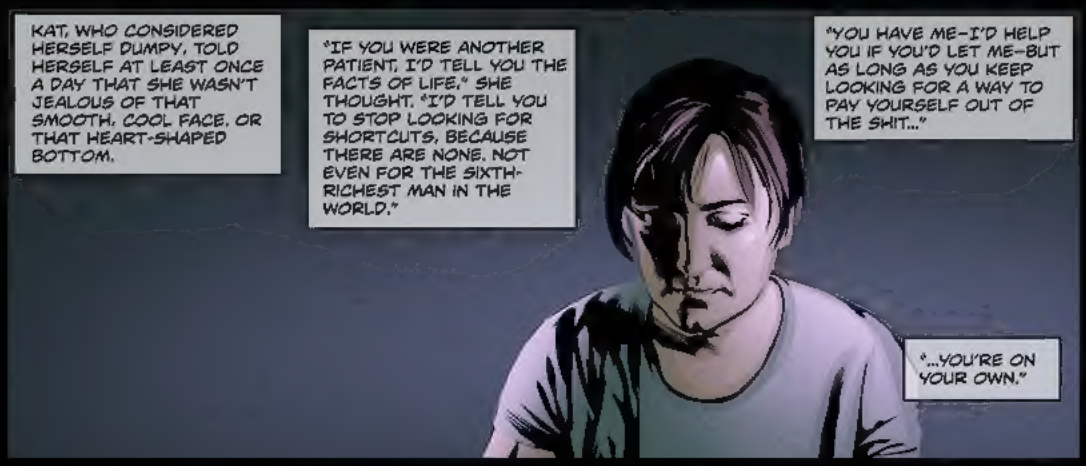
OR SO SHE THOUGHT...

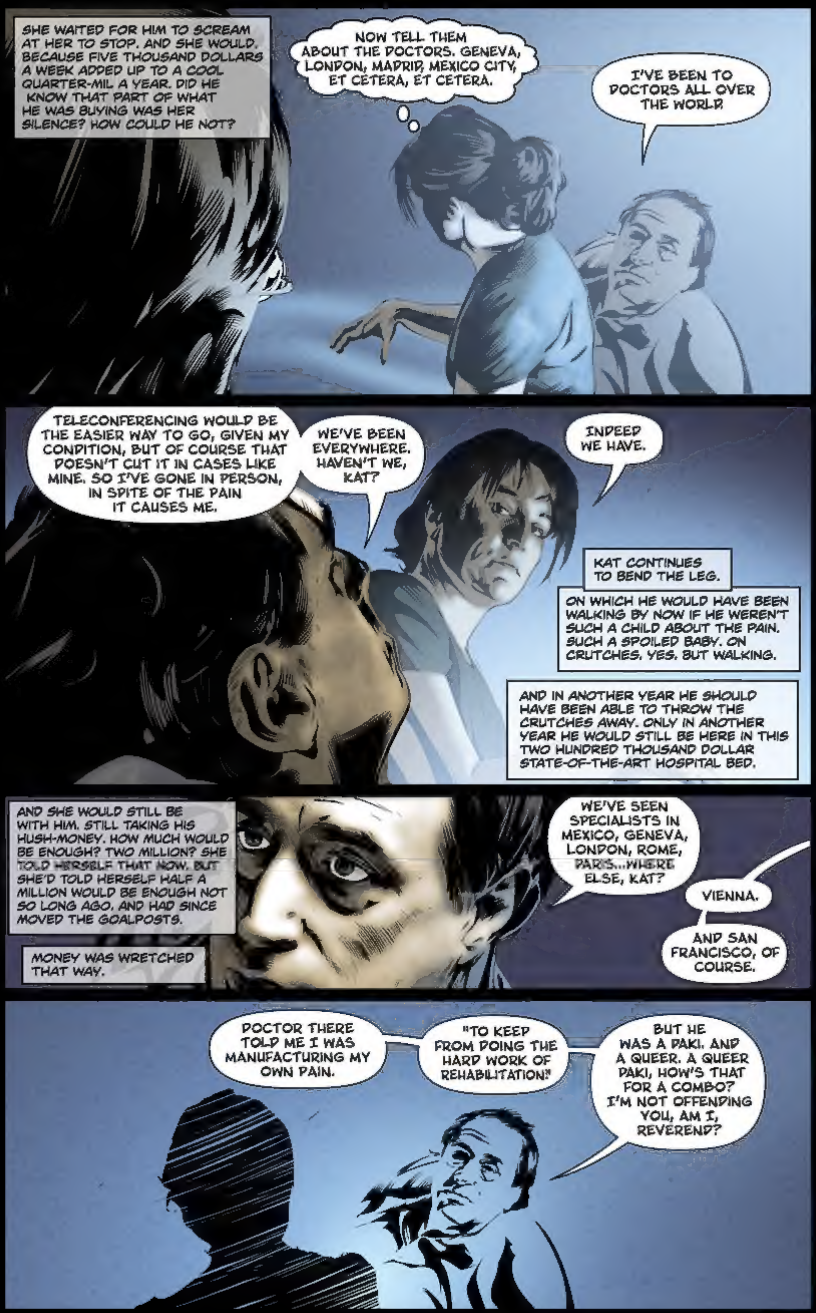
THESE WERE TRUE PROMISES ANDREW NEWSOME HAD CHOSEN NOT TO HEAR.
IT WAS HIS BELIEF—NEVER STATED BALDLY, IN WORDS OF ONE SYLLABLE, BUT UNDOUBTEDLY ONE OF THE STARS HE STEERED BY—THAT THE SIXTH-RICHEST MAN IN THE WORLD SHOULD NOT HAVE TO VISIT THE LAND OF PAIN UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES, ONLY THE COSTA DEL SOL OF FULL RECOVERY. BLAMING THE DOCTORS FOLLOWED AS DAY FOLLOWS NIGHT.
AND OF COURSE HE BLAMED FATE. THINGS LIKE THIS WERE NOT SUPPOSED TO HAPPEN TO GUYS LIKE HIM.


NO ONE'S IN THE MOOD FOR BAKED GOODS, 'LISSA.
HERE WAS ANOTHER THING KAT MACDONALD HAD DISCOVERED ABOUT THE MEGA-RICH, THOSE DOLLAR-BABIES WHO HAD AMASSED ASSETS BEYOND ORDINARY COMPREHENSION: THEY FELT VERY CONFIDENT ABOUT SPEAKING FOR EVERYONE IN THE ROOM.

SHE HAD TO BE AT LEAST FORTY-FIVE, BUT LOOKED YOUNGER. SHE WASN'T SEXY...NOTHING SO VULGAR.
RATHER THERE WAS AN ICE-QUEEN GLAMOUR ABOUT HER THAT MADE KAT THINK OF INGRID BERGMAN.

ICY OR NOT, KAT SUPPOSED MEN WOULD WONDER HOW THAT CHESTNUT HAIR WOULD LOOK FREED FROM ITS CLIPS, AND LYING ALL MUSSED UP ON A PILLOW.
HOW HER CORAL LIPSTICK WOULD LOOK SMEARED ON HER TEETH AND UP ONE CHEEK.


KAT, WHO CONSIDERED HERSELF DUMPY, TOLD HERSELF AT LEAST ONCE A DAY THAT SHE WASN'T JEALOUS OF THAT SMOOTH, COOL FACE, OR THAT HEART-SHAPED BOTTOM.
"IF YOU WERE ANOTHER PATIENT, I'D TELL YOU THE FACTS OF LIFE," SHE THOUGHT. "I'D TELL YOU TO STOP LOOKING FOR SHORTCUTS, BECAUSE THERE ARE NONE. NOT EVEN FOR THE SIXTH-RICHEST MAN IN THE WORLD."
"YOU HAVE ME—I'D HELP YOU IF YOU'D LET ME—BUT AS LONG AS YOU KEEP LOOKING FOR A WAY TO PAY YOURSELF OUT OF THE SHIT..."
"...YOU'RE ON YOUR OWN."


SHE WAITED FOR HIM TO SCREAM AT HER TO STOP. AND SHE WOULD. BECAUSE FIVE THOUSAND DOLLARS A WEEK ADDED UP TO A COOL QUARTER-MIL A YEAR. DID HE KNOW THAT PART OF WHAT HE WAS BUYING WAS HER SILENCE? HOW COULD HE NOT?
NOW TELL THEM ABOUT THE DOCTORS. GENEVA, LONDON, MADRID, MEXICO CITY, ET CETERA, ET CETERA.
I'VE BEEN TO DOCTORS ALL OVER THE WORLD
TELECONFERENCING WOULD BE THE EASIER WAY TO GO, GIVEN MY CONDITION, BUT OF COURSE THAT DOESN'T CUT IT IN CASES LIKE MINE. SO I'VE GONE IN PERSON, IN SPITE OF THE PAIN IT CAUSES ME.
WE'VE BEEN EVERYWHERE. HAVEN'T WE, KAT?
INDEED WE HAVE.
KAT CONTINUES TO BEND THE LEG.
ON WHICH HE WOULD HAVE BEEN WALKING BY NOW IF HE WEREN'T SUCH A CHILD ABOUT THE PAIN. SUCH A SPOILED BABY. ON CRUTCHES, YES, BUT WALKING.
AND IN ANOTHER YEAR HE SHOULD HAVE BEEN ABLE TO THROW THE CRUTCHES AWAY. ONLY IN ANOTHER YEAR HE WOULD STILL BE HERE IN THIS TWO HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLAR STATE-OF-THE-ART HOSPITAL BED.
AND SHE WOULD STILL BE WITH HIM. STILL TAKING HIS HUSH-MONEY. HOW MUCH WOULD BE ENOUGH? TWO MILLION? SHE TOLD HERSELF THAT NOW. BUT SHE'D TOLD HERSELF HALF A MILLION WOULD BE ENOUGH NOT SO LONG AGO, AND HAD SINCE MOVED THE GOALPOSTS.
MONEY WAS WRETCHED THAT WAY.
WE'VE SEEN SPECIALISTS IN MEXICO, GENEVA, LONDON, ROME, PARIS...WHERE ELSE, KAT?
VIENNA.
AND SAN FRANCISCO, OF COURSE.
DOCTOR THERE TOLD ME I WAS MANUFACTURING MY OWN PAIN.
"TO KEEP FROM DOING THE HARD WORK OF REHABILITATION."
BUT HE WAS A PAKI. AND A QUEER. A QUEER PAKI, HOW'S THAT FOR A COMBO? I'M NOT OFFENDING YOU, AM I, REVEREND?

GOOD, GOOD. STOP, KAT, THAT'S ENOUGH.

A LITTLE MORE.

STOP, I SAID. THAT'S ALL I CAN TAKE.

HE OFTEN TOLD PEOPLE BOTH OF HIS ARMS HAD ALSO BEEN BROKEN, BUT THIS WASN'T TRUE.

THE LEFT ONE HAD ONLY BEEN SPRAINED. HE ALSO TOLD PEOPLE HE WAS LUCKY NOT TO BE IN A WHEELCHAIR, BUT THE ALL-THE-BELLS-AND-WHISTLES HOSPITAL BED SUGGESTED STRONGLY THAT THIS WAS LUCK HE HAD NO INTENTION OF CAPITALIZING ON IN THE NEAR FUTURE.

THE ALL-THE-BELLS-AND-WHISTLES HOSPITAL BED WAS HIS WHEELCHAIR. IT ROLLED. HE HAD RIDDEN ALL OVER THE WORLD IN IT.

NEUROPATHIC PAIN. IT'S A GREAT MYSTERY. PERHAPS INSOLUBLE. THE DRUGS NO LONGER WORK.

THE CONSENSUS IS THAT I'M SUFFERING FROM NEUROPATHIC PAIN.

AND COWARDICE.

IT'S A GREAT MYSTERY.

ALSO A GOOD EXCUSE.

PERHAPS INSOLUBLE.

ESPECIALLY WHEN YOU DON'T TRY.

THE DRUGS NO LONGER WORK AND THE DOCTORS CAN'T HELP ME. THAT'S WHY I'VE BROUGHT YOU HERE, REVEREND RIDEOUT. YOUR REFERENCES IN THE MATTER OF..ER...

...HEALING. ..ARE...

..VERY STRONG.

HE HAD CHARISMA, OF THAT THERE COULD BE NO DOUBT. THE CHARLATANS OF THE WORLD COULDN'T GET ALONG WITHOUT IT.

I DON'T HEAL.

BUT SHE HADN'T REALIZED HOW MUCH OR HOW STRONG IT WAS UNTIL HE GOT TO HIS FEET AND TOWERED OVER THEM.

NO? I SENT A TEAM OF INVESTIGATORS, AND THEY ASSURE ME THAT IN MANY CASES—

I EXPEL.

I BEG YOUR PARDON.

I EXTERMINATE THE PEST FROM THE WOUNDED BODY IT'S FEEDING ON, JUST AS A BUG EXTERMINATOR WOULD EXTERMINATE PESTS, TERMITES, FOR INSTANCE, FEEDING ON A HOUSE.

YOU'VE BEEN POSSESSED, SIR.

NOW I HAVE HEARD ABSOLUTELY EVERYTHING. BUT NEWSOME IS FASCINATED LIKE A KID WATCHING A THREE-CARD MONTE EXPERT ON A STREET CORNER.

YES, THAT'S WHAT IT FEELS LIKE. ESPECIALLY AT NIGHT. THE NIGHTS ARE... VERY LONG.

EVERY MAN OR WOMAN WHO SUFFERS PAIN IS POSSESSED, OF COURSE, BUT IN SOME UNFORTUNATE PEOPLE - YOU ARE ONE - THE PROBLEM GOES DEEPER.

THE POSSESSION ISN'T A TRANSIENT THING, BUT A PERMANENT CONDITION.

ONE THAT WORSENS. DOCTORS DON'T BELIEVE, BECAUSE THEY ARE MEN OF SCIENCE. BUT YOU BELIEVE, DON'T YOU? BECAUSE YOU'RE THE ONE WHO'S SUFFERING.

YOU BET.

IN THESE UNFORTUNATES PAIN OPENS THE WAY FOR A DEMON GOD. IT'S SMALL, BUT DANGEROUS. IT FEEDS ON A SPECIAL KIND OF HURT PRODUCED ONLY BY CERTAIN SPECIAL PEOPLE.

GENIUS. HE'S GOING TO LOVE THAT.

ONCE THE GOD FINDS ITS WAY IN, PAIN BECOMES AGONY.

IT FEEDS JUST AS TERMITES FEED ON WOOD AND IT WILL EAT UNTIL YOU ARE ALL USED UP. THEN IT WILL CAST YOU ASIDE, SIR, AND MOVE ON.

WHAT GOD WOULD THAT BE? CERTAINLY NOT THE ONE YOU PREACH ABOUT.

THAT ONE IS THE GOD OF LOVE. OR SO I GREW UP BELIEVING.

WHAT DO YOU SAY TO THAT, REV?

I SAY THAT THERE ARE MANY GODS.

THE FACT THAT OUR LORD, THE LORD GOD OF HOSTS, RULES THEM ALL -AND ON THE DAY OF JUDGMENT WILL DESTROY THEM ALL - DOES NOT CHANGE THAT.

THESE LITTLE GODS HAVE BEEN WORSHIPPED BY PEOPLE BOTH ANCIENT AND MODERN. THEY HAVE THEIR POWERS, AND OUR GOD SOMETIMES ALLOWS THOSE POWERS TO BE EXERCISED.

AS A TEST.

AS A TEST OF OUR STRENGTH AND FAITH.

YOU ARE A MAN OF MUCH STRENGTH AND LITTLE FAITH.

I DON'T HAVE MUCH IN THE WAY OF CHRISTIAN FAITH, THAT'S TRUE, BUT I HAVE FAITH IN MYSELF. I ALSO HAVE FAITH IN MONEY. HOW MUCH DO YOU WANT?

HOW MUCH WOULD YOU PAY TO BE FREE OF YOUR PAIN, SIR?

TEN MILLION DOLLARS.

BUT I DIDN'T GET TO WHERE I AM BY BEING A SUCKER. IF YOU DO WHATEVER IT IS YOU DO - EXPELLING, EXTERMINATING, EXORCISING, CALL IT WHAT YOU WANT -YOU GET THE MONEY. IN CASH, IF YOU DON'T MIND SPENDING THE NIGHT.

FAIL, AND YOU GET NOTHING.

EXCEPT YOUR FIRST AND ONLY ROUND-TRIP ON A PRIVATE JET.

FOR THAT THERE WILL BE NO CHARGE. AFTER ALL, I REACHED OUT TO YOU.

NO.

NO?

YOU TELL ME NO?

I GET IT. NOW COMES THE CURVE BALL. I'M DISAPPOINTED, REVEREND RIDEOUT. I REALLY HOPED YOU WERE ON THE LEVEL.

KAT, OF COURSE, THINKS I'VE LOST MY MIND. BUT I HAVEN'T SHARED THE INVESTIGATORS' REPORTS WITH YOU. HAVE I?

NO.

THERE'S NO CURVE BALL. I HAVEN'T PERFORMED AN EXPULSION IN FIVE YEARS. DID YOUR INVESTIGATORS TELL YOU THAT?

IS IT BECAUSE YOU'VE LOST YOUR POWERS? IF THAT'S THE CASE, WHY DID YOU COME?

IT'S GOD'S POWER, SIR, NOT MINE, AND I HAVEN'T LOST IT. BUT AN EXPULSION TAKES GREAT ENERGY AND GREAT STRENGTH.

FIVE YEARS AGO I SUFFERED A MAJOR HEART ATTACK SHORTLY AFTER PERFORMING ONE ON A YOUNG GIRL WHO HAD BEEN IN A TERRIBLE CAR ACCIDENT.

WE WERE SUCCESSFUL, SHE AND I...

...BUT THE CARDIOLOGIST I CONSULTED IN JONESBORO TOLD ME THAT IF I EVER EXERTED MYSELF IN SUCH A WAY AGAIN, I MIGHT SUFFER ANOTHER ATTACK.

THIS ONE FATAL.

I THINK HE WANTS TWENTY MILLION.

WHAT I WANT, SIR, IS SEVEN HUNDRED AND FIFTY THOUSAND

WHY?

I AM PASTOR OF A CHURCH IN TITUSVILLE. THE CHURCH OF HOLY FAITH IT'S CALLED ONLY THERE'S NO CHURCH ANYMORE.

WE HAD A DRY SUMMER IN MY PART OF THE WORLD THERE WAS A WILDFIRE, PROBABLY STARTED BY CAMPERS. AND PROBABLY DRUNK. THAT'S USUALLY THE CASE.

MY CHURCH IS NOW JUST A CONCRETE FOOTPRINT AND A FEW CHARRED BEAMS. I AND MY PARISHIONERS HAVE BEEN WORSHIPPING IN AN ABANDONED GAS STATION-CONVENIENCE STORE ON THE JONESBORO PIKE.

IT IS NOT SATISFACTORY DURING THE WINTER MONTHS, AND THERE ARE NO HOMES LARGE ENOUGH TO ACCOMMODATE US.

WE ARE MANY BUT POOR.

INSURANCE?

WE TRUST IN GOD

IN THIS CASE, YOU MIGHT HAVE BEEN BETTER OFF WITH ALLSTATE.

IT WILL COST APPROXIMATELY SIX HUNDRED AND FIFTY THOUSAND DOLLARS TO REBUILD

I HAVE TAKEN THE LIBERTY OF ADDING ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLARS, JUST TO BE ON THE SAFE SIDE.

WE DON'T HAVE SUCH MONETARY RESOURCES, OF COURSE. BUT THEN, NOT EVEN A WEEK AFTER SPEAKING WITH MR. KIERNAN, YOUR LETTER CAME, ALONG WITH THE VIDEO-DISC. WHICH I WATCHED WITH GREAT INTEREST, BY THE WAY.

I'LL BET YOU DID. ESPECIALLY THE PART WHERE THE DOCTOR FROM SAN FRANCISCO SAYS THE PAIN ASSOCIATED WITH HIS INJURIES CAN BE GREATLY ALLEVIATED BY PHYSICAL THERAPY. STRINGENT PHYSICAL THERAPY.

WILL YOU PAY ME ENOUGH TO REBUILD MY CHURCH, SIR?

YES.

ALTHOUGH IF YOU'RE ABLE TO REMOVE THE PAIN - EXPEL THE PAIN - I MIGHT WELL MAKE A CONTRIBUTION OF SOME SIZE.

THAT WOULD BE YOUR BUSINESS, SIR.

SHALL WE BEGIN?

NO TIME LIKE THE PRESENT. DO YOU WANT EVERYONE TO LEAVE?

I WILL NEED ASSISTANCE.

MAGICIANS ALWAYS DO. IT'S PART OF THE SHOW.

MR. JENSEN THERE, I THINK. HE LOOKS STRONG AND QUICK.

HE'S BOTH.

PLAYED FOOTBALL IN COLLEGE. RUNNING BACK. HASN'T LOST A STEP SINCE.

WELL... A FEW.

ANSWER A QUESTION FOR ME, SIR. WHAT COLOR IS YOUR PAIN?

GREEN. MY PAIN IS GREEN.

AND WHERE IS IT?

EVERYWHERE.

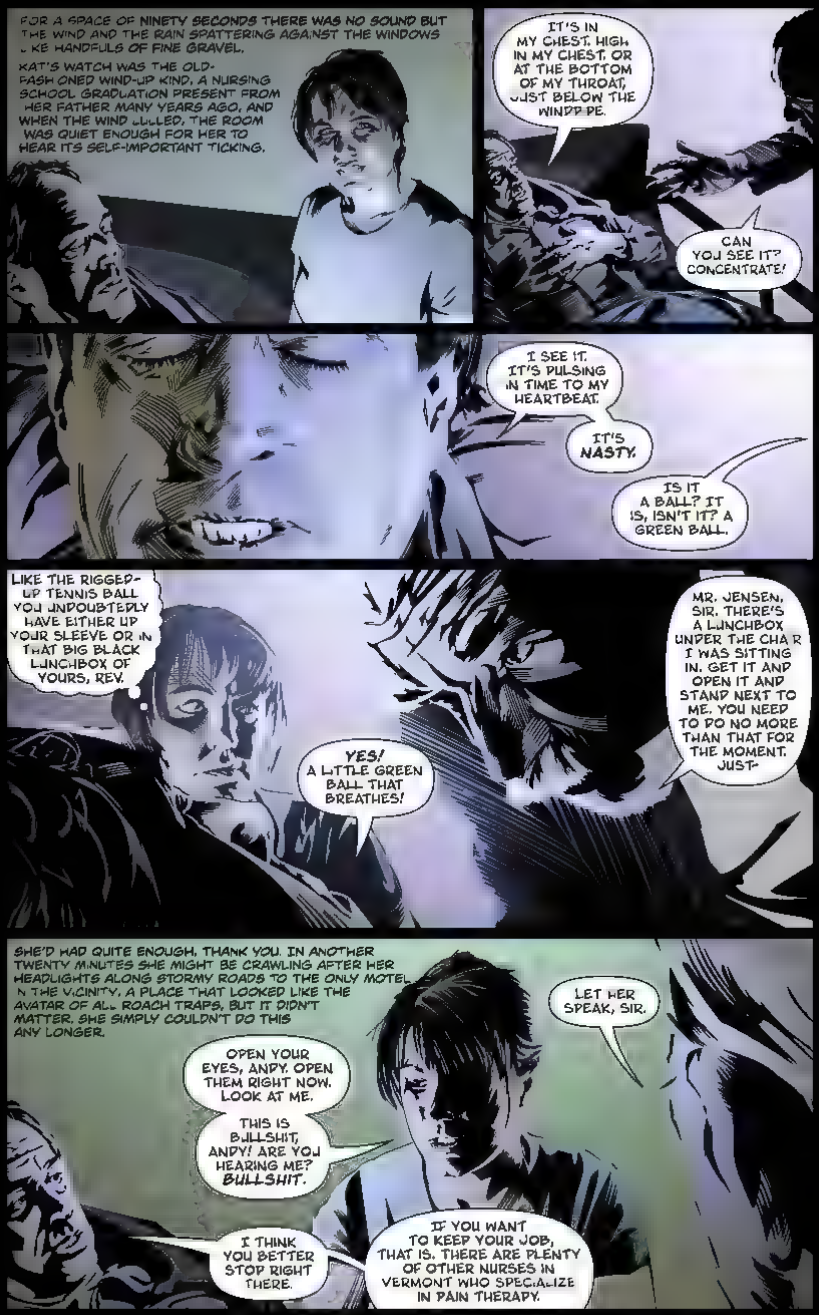
YES, IT LIKES TO GIVE THAT IMPRESSION, BUT IT'S NOT SO.

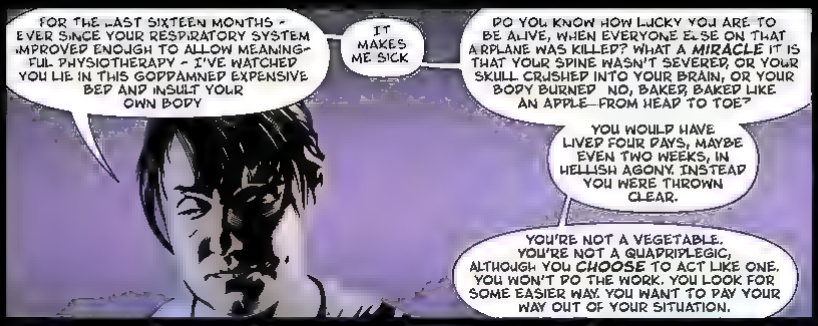
CLOSE YOUR EYES, SIR, AND CONCENTRATE.

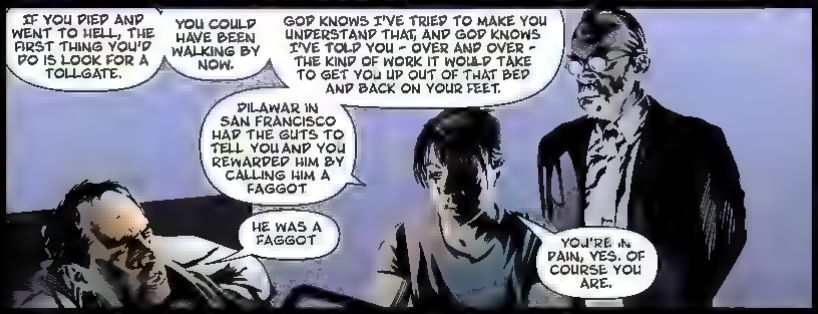
LOOK FOR THE PAIN. LOOK PAST THE FALSE SHOUTS IT GIVES, IGNORE THE CHEAP VENTRILOQUISM, AND LOCATE IT.

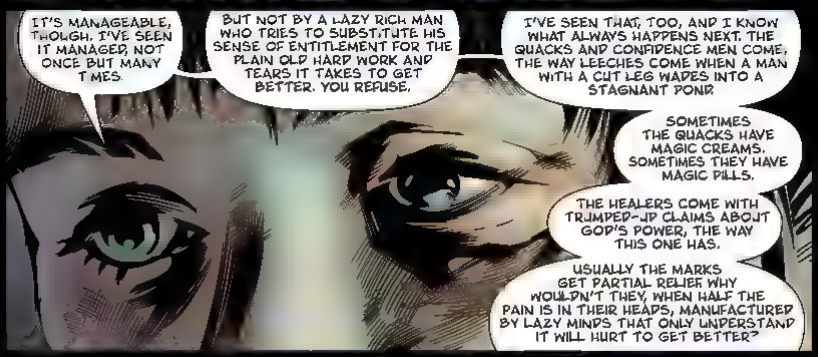
YOU CAN DO THIS. YOU MUST DO IT...

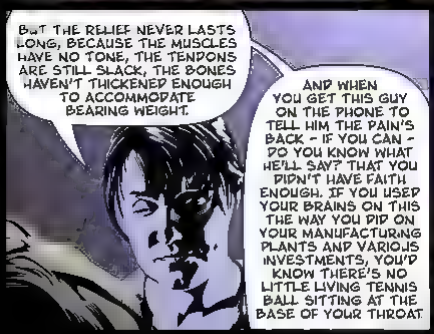
...IF WE'RE TO HAVE ANY SUCCESS.


FOR A SPACE OF NINETY SECONDS THERE WAS NO SOUND BUT THE WIND AND THE RAIN SPATTERING AGAINST THE WINDOWS LIKE HANDFULS OF FINE GRAVEL.
KAT'S WATCH WAS THE OLD-FASHIONED WIND-UP KIND, A NURSING SCHOOL GRADUATION PRESENT FROM HER FATHER MANY YEARS AGO, AND WHEN THE WIND LULLED, THE ROOM WAS QUIET ENOUGH FOR HER TO HEAR ITS SELF-IMPORTANT TICKING.
IT'S IN MY CHEST. HIGH IN MY CHEST. OR AT THE BOTTOM OF MY THROAT, JUST BELOW THE WINDPIPE.
CAN YOU SEE IT? CONCENTRATE!
I SEE IT. IT'S PULSING IN TIME TO MY HEARTBEAT.
IT'S NASTY.
IS IT A BALL? IT IS, ISN'T IT? A GREEN BALL.
LIKE THE RIGGED-UP TENNIS BALL YOU UNDOUBTEDLY HAVE EITHER UP YOUR SLEEVE OR IN THAT BIG BLACK LUNCHBOX OF YOURS, REV.
YES! A LITTLE GREEN BALL THAT BREATHES!
MR. JENSEN, SIR. THERE'S A LUNCHBOX UNDER THE CHAIR I WAS SITTING IN. GET IT AND OPEN IT AND STAND NEXT TO ME. YOU NEED TO DO NO MORE THAN THAT FOR THE MOMENT. JUST-
SHE'D HAD QUITE ENOUGH, THANK YOU. IN ANOTHER TWENTY MINUTES SHE MIGHT BE CRAWLING AFTER HER HEADLIGHTS ALONG STORMY ROADS TO THE ONLY MOTEL IN THE VICINITY, A PLACE THAT LOOKED LIKE THE AVATAR OF ALL ROACH TRAPS, BUT IT DIDN'T MATTER. SHE SIMPLY COULDN'T DO THIS ANY LONGER.
LET HER SPEAK, SIR.
OPEN YOUR EYES, ANDY. OPEN THEM RIGHT NOW. LOOK AT ME.
THIS IS BULLSHIT, ANDY! ARE YOU HEARING ME? BULLSHIT.
I THINK YOU BETTER STOP RIGHT THERE.
IF YOU WANT TO KEEP YOUR JOB, THAT IS. THERE ARE PLENTY OF OTHER NURSES IN VERMONT WHO SPECIALIZE IN PAIN THERAPY.


FOR THE LAST SIXTEEN MONTHS - EVER SINCE YOUR RESPIRATORY SYSTEM IMPROVED ENOUGH TO ALLOW MEANINGFUL PHYSIOTHERAPY - I'VE WATCHED YOU LIE IN THIS GODDAMNED EXPENSIVE BED AND INSULT YOUR OWN BODY
IT MAKES ME SICK
DO YOU KNOW HOW LUCKY YOU ARE TO BE ALIVE, WHEN EVERYONE ELSE ON THAT AIRPLANE WAS KILLED? WHAT A MIRACLE IT IS THAT YOUR SPINE WASN'T SEVERED, OR YOUR SKULL CRUSHED INTO YOUR BRAIN, OR YOUR BODY BURNED NO, BAKED, BAKED LIKE AN APPLE—FROM HEAD TO TOE?
YOU WOULD HAVE LIVED FOUR DAYS, MAYBE EVEN TWO WEEKS, IN HELLISH AGONY. INSTEAD YOU WERE THROWN CLEAR.
YOU'RE NOT A VEGETABLE. YOU'RE NOT A QUADRIPLEGIC, ALTHOUGH YOU CHOOSE TO ACT LIKE ONE. YOU WON'T DO THE WORK. YOU LOOK FOR SOME EASIER WAY. YOU WANT TO PAY YOUR WAY OUT OF YOUR SITUATION.

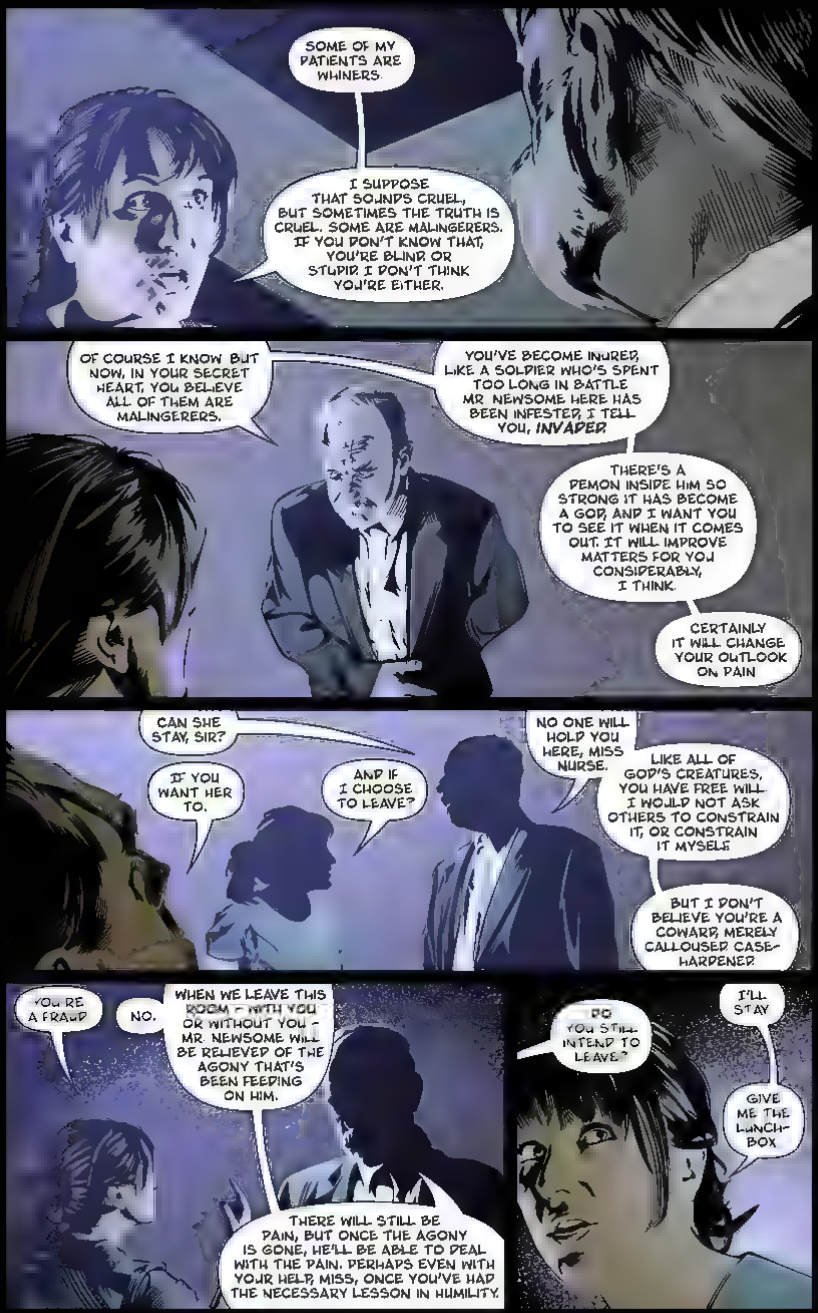

IF YOU DIED AND WENT TO HELL, THE FIRST THING YOU'D DO IS LOOK FOR A TOLLGATE.
YOU COULD HAVE BEEN WALKING BY NOW.
GOD KNOWS I'VE TRIED TO MAKE YOU UNDERSTAND THAT, AND GOD KNOWS I'VE TOLD YOU - OVER AND OVER - THE KIND OF WORK IT WOULD TAKE TO GET YOU UP OUT OF THAT BED AND BACK ON YOUR FEET.
DILAWAR IN SAN FRANCISCO HAD THE GUTS TO TELL YOU AND YOU REWARDED HIM BY CALLING HIM A FAGGOT
HE WAS A FAGGOT
YOU'RE IN PAIN, YES. OF COURSE YOU ARE.

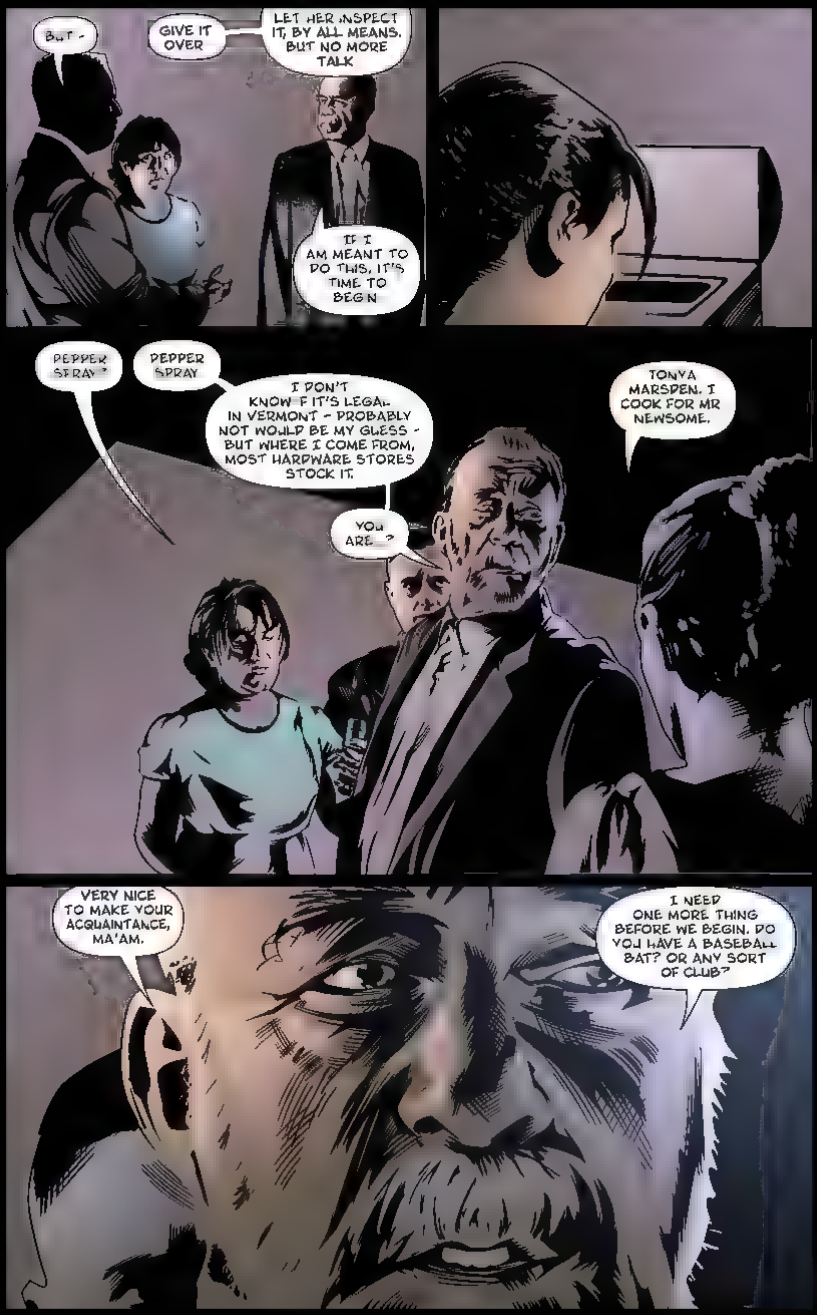

IT'S MANAGEABLE, THOUGH. I'VE SEEN IT MANAGED, NOT ONCE BUT MANY TIMES.
BUT NOT BY A LAZY RICH MAN WHO TRIES TO SUBSTITUTE HIS SENSE OF ENTITLEMENT FOR THE PLAIN OLD HARD WORK AND TEARS IT TAKES TO GET BETTER. YOU REFUSE.
I'VE SEEN THAT, TOO, AND I KNOW WHAT ALWAYS HAPPENS NEXT. THE QUACKS AND CONFIDENCE MEN COME, THE WAY LEECHES COME WHEN A MAN WITH A CUT LEG WADES INTO A STAGNANT POND
SOMETIMES THE QUACKS HAVE MAGIC CREAMS. SOMETIMES THEY HAVE MAGIC PILLS.
THE HEALERS COME WITH TRUMPED-UP CLAIMS ABOUT GOD'S POWER, THE WAY THIS ONE HAS.
USUALLY THE MARKS GET PARTIAL RELIEF WHY WOULDN'T THEY, WHEN HALF THE PAIN IS IN THEIR HEADS, MANUFACTURED BY LAZY MINDS THAT ONLY UNDERSTAND IT WILL HURT TO GET BETTER?

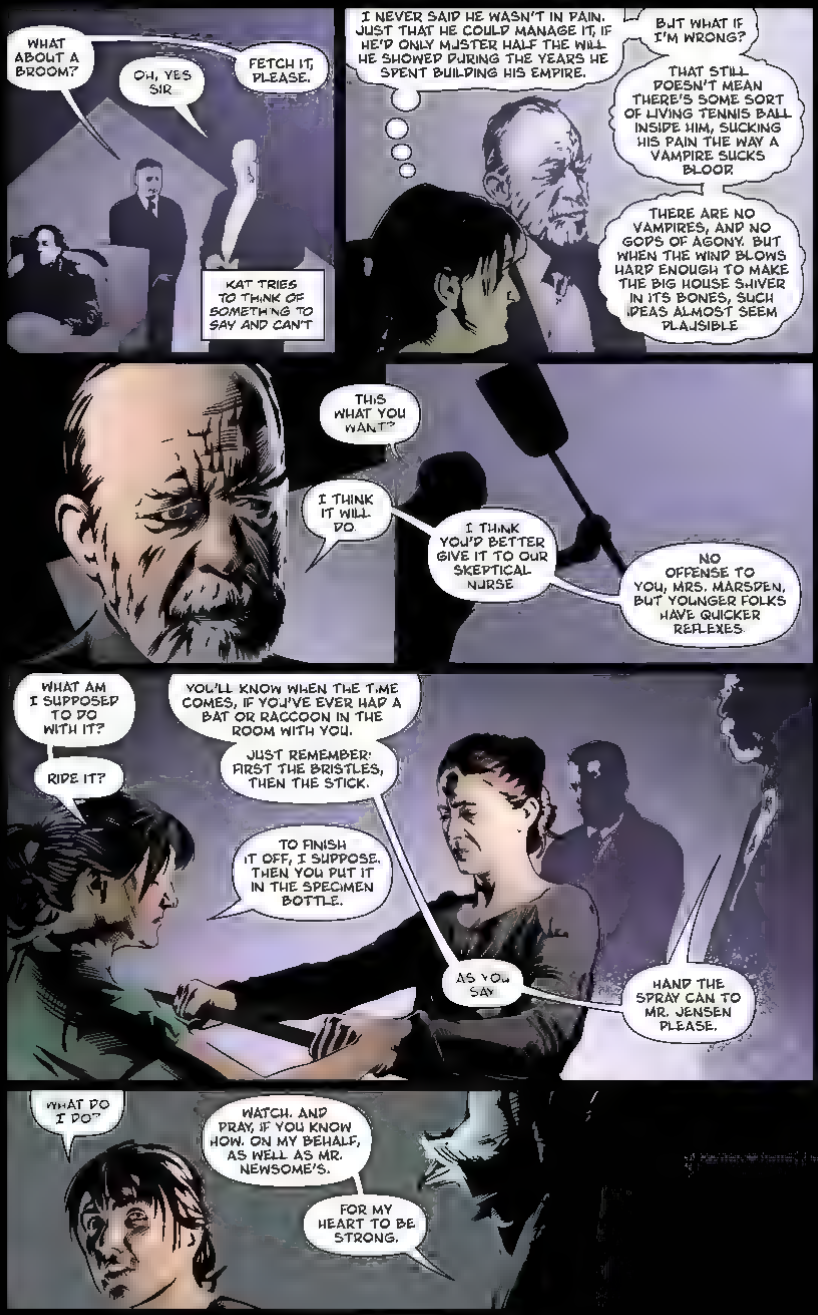

BUT THE RELIEF NEVER LASTS LONG, BECAUSE THE MUSCLES HAVE NO TONE, THE TENDONS ARE STILL SLACK, THE BONES HAVEN'T THICKENED ENOUGH TO ACCOMMODATE BEARING WEIGHT.
AND WHEN YOU GET THIS GUY ON THE PHONE TO TELL HIM THE PAIN'S BACK - IF YOU CAN - DO YOU KNOW WHAT HE'LL SAY? THAT YOU DIDN'T HAVE FAITH ENOUGH. IF YOU USED YOUR BRAINS ON THIS THE WAY YOU DID ON YOUR MANUFACTURING PLANTS AND VARIOUS INVESTMENTS, YOU'D KNOW THERE'S NO LITTLE LIVING TENNIS BALL SITTING AT THE BASE OF YOUR THROAT

YOU'RE TOO FUCKING OLD TO BELIEVE IN SANTA CLAUS, ANDY.
YOU'RE FIRED

YES, OF COURSE I AM
ALTHOUGH I MUST SAY THAT THIS IS THE BEST I'VE FELT IN ALMOST A YEAR
DON'T FIRE HER.
IF YOU DO, I'LL HAVE TO TAKE MY LEAVE.
SHE NEEDS AN EDUCATION, PRAISE GOD'S HOLY NAME.
SHE'S HAD HER SAY. SHALL I HAVE MINE?
HAVE AT HER, RIPEOUT. I BELIEVE I WANT TO HEAR THIS.
SO DO I
YOU'VE NEVER SUFFERED YOURSELF, HAVE YOU MISS?
I FELL OUT OF A TREE WHEN I WAS ELEVEN AND BROKE MY ARM.
BELITTLE ME ALL YOU WANT. I BASED WHAT I SAID ON YEARS OF EXPERIENCE DEALING WITH PAIN PATIENTS. IT IS A MEDICAL OPINION.
BROKE AN ARM WHILE YOU WERE ELEVEN.
YES, THAT MUST HAVE BEEN EXCRUCIATING.
I'M SURE.
AND I'M SURE YOU'RE GOOD AT WHAT YOU DO. I'M SURE YOU'VE SEEN YOUR SHARE OF FAKERS AND POSERS. YOU KNOW THEIR KIND.
AND I KNOW YOURS, MISS, BECAUSE I'VE SEEN IT MANY TIMES BEFORE.
THEY'RE USUALLY NOT AS PRETTY AS YOU BUT, THEIR CONDESCENDING ATTITUDE TOWARD PAIN THEY HAVE NEVER FELT THEMSELVES, PAIN THEY CAN'T EVEN CONCEIVE OF, IS ALWAYS THE SAME.
THEY WORK IN SICKROOMS, THEY WORK WITH PATIENTS WHO ARE IN VARYING DEGREES OF DISTRESS--FROM MILD PAIN TO DEEPEST, SEARING AGONY. AND AFTER A WHILE, IT ALL STARTS TO LOOK EITHER OVERDONE OR OUTRIGHT FAKE TO THEM, ISN'T THAT SO?
THAT'S NOT TRUE AT ALL.
NO?
WHEN YOU BEND THEIR LEGS AND THEY SCREAM AT FIFTEEN DEGREES - OR EVEN AT TEN - DON'T YOU THINK, FIRST IN THE BACK OF YOUR MIND, THEN MORE AND MORE TOWARD THE FRONT, THAT THEY ARE LOLLYGAGGING? REFUSING TO DO THE HARD WORK?
PERHAPS EVEN FISHING FOR SYMPATHY?
WHEN YOU ENTER THE ROOM AND THEIR FACES GO PALE, DON'T YOU THINK, "OH, NOW I HAVE TO DEAL WITH THIS LAZY THING AGAIN?"
HAVEN'T YOU - WHO ONCE FELL FROM A TREE AND BROKE YOUR ARM, FOR THE LORD'S SAKE - BECOME MORE AND MORE DISGUSTED WHEN THEY BEG TO BE PUT BACK INTO BED AND BE GIVEN MORE MORPHINE OR WHATEVER?
ONCE UPON A TIME, WHEN YOU WERE NEW AT THIS, YOU KNEW AGONY WHEN YOU SAW IT.
ONCE UPON A TIME YOU WOULD HAVE BELIEVED IN WHAT YOU ARE GOING TO SEE IN JUST A FEW MINUTES, BECAUSE YOU KNEW IN YOUR HEART THAT MALIGNANT OUTSIDER GOD WAS THERE.
I WANT YOU TO STAY SO I CAN REFRESH YOUR MEMORY.. AND THE SENSE OF COMPASSION THAT'S GOTTEN LOST SOMEWHERE ALONG THE WAY.


SOME OF MY PATIENTS ARE WHINERS.
I SUPPOSE THAT SOUNDS CRUEL, BUT SOMETIMES THE TRUTH IS CRUEL. SOME ARE MALINGERERS. IF YOU DON'T KNOW THAT, YOU'RE BLIND OR STUPID. I DON'T THINK YOU'RE EITHER.
OF COURSE I KNOW. BUT NOW, IN YOUR SECRET HEART, YOU BELIEVE ALL OF THEM ARE MALINGERERS.
YOU'VE BECOME INURED, LIKE A SOLDIER WHO'S SPENT TOO LONG IN BATTLE. MR. NEWSOME HERE HAS BEEN INFESTED, I TELL YOU, INVADED.
THERE'S A DEMON INSIDE HIM SO STRONG IT HAS BECOME A GOD, AND I WANT YOU TO SEE IT WHEN IT COMES OUT. IT WILL IMPROVE MATTERS FOR YOU CONSIDERABLY, I THINK.
CERTAINLY IT WILL CHANGE YOUR OUTLOOK ON PAIN.
CAN SHE STAY, SIR?
IF YOU WANT HER TO.
AND IF I CHOOSE TO LEAVE?
NO ONE WILL HOLD YOU HERE, MISS NURSE.
LIKE ALL OF GOD'S CREATURES, YOU HAVE FREE WILL. I WOULD NOT ASK OTHERS TO CONSTRAIN IT, OR CONSTRAIN IT MYSELF.
BUT I DON'T BELIEVE YOU'RE A COWARD, MERELY CALLOUSED CASE-HARDENED.
YOU'RE A FRAUD.
NO.
WHEN WE LEAVE THIS ROOM - WITH YOU OR WITHOUT YOU - MR. NEWSOME WILL BE RELIEVED OF THE AGONY THAT'S BEEN FEEDING ON HIM.
THERE WILL STILL BE PAIN, BUT ONCE THE AGONY IS GONE, HE'LL BE ABLE TO DEAL WITH THE PAIN. PERHAPS EVEN WITH YOUR HELP, MISS, ONCE YOU'VE HAD THE NECESSARY LESSON IN HUMILITY.
DO YOU STILL INTEND TO LEAVE?
I'LL STAY.
GIVE ME THE LUNCH-BOX.


But -
GIVE IT OVER
LET HER INSPECT IT, BY ALL MEANS. BUT NO MORE TALK
IF I AM MEANT TO DO THIS, IT'S TIME TO BEGIN
PEPPER SPRAY?
PEPPER SPRAY
I DON'T KNOW IF IT'S LEGAL IN VERMONT - PROBABLY NOT WOULD BE MY GUESS - BUT WHERE I COME FROM, MOST HARDWARE STORES STOCK IT.
YOU ARE ?
TONYA MARSDEN. I COOK FOR MR NEWSOME.
VERY NICE TO MAKE YOUR ACQUAINTANCE, MA'AM.
I NEED ONE MORE THING BEFORE WE BEGIN. DO YOU HAVE A BASEBALL BAT? OR ANY SORT OF CLUB?


WHAT ABOUT A BROOM?
OH, YES SIR.
FETCH IT, PLEASE.
KAT TRIES TO THINK OF SOMETHING TO SAY AND CAN'T
I NEVER SAID HE WASN'T IN PAIN. JUST THAT HE COULD MANAGE IT, IF HE'D ONLY MUSTER HALF THE WILL HE SHOWED DURING THE YEARS HE SPENT BUILDING HIS EMPIRE.
BUT WHAT IF I'M WRONG?
THAT STILL DOESN'T MEAN THERE'S SOME SORT OF LIVING TENNIS BALL INSIDE HIM, SUCKING HIS PAIN THE WAY A VAMPIRE SUCKS BLOOD
THERE ARE NO VAMPIRES, AND NO GODS OF AGONY. BUT WHEN THE WIND BLOWS HARD ENOUGH TO MAKE THE BIG HOUSE SHIVER IN ITS BONES, SUCH IDEAS ALMOST SEEM PLAUSIBLE
THIS WHAT YOU WANT?
I THINK IT WILL DO.
I THINK YOU'D BETTER GIVE IT TO OUR SKEPTICAL NURSE
NO OFFENSE TO YOU, MRS. MARSDEN, BUT YOUNGER FOLKS HAVE QUICKER REFLEXES
WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO DO WITH IT?
RIDE IT?
YOU'LL KNOW WHEN THE TIME COMES, IF YOU'VE EVER HAD A BAT OR RACCOON IN THE ROOM WITH YOU.
JUST REMEMBER: FIRST THE BRISTLES, THEN THE STICK.
TO FINISH IT OFF, I SUPPOSE. THEN YOU PUT IT IN THE SPECIMEN BOTTLE.
AS YOU SAY.
HAND THE SPRAY CAN TO MR. JENSEN PLEASE.
WHAT DO I DO?
WATCH. AND PRAY, IF YOU KNOW HOW. ON MY BEHALF, AS WELL AS MR. NEWSOME'S.
FOR MY HEART TO BE STRONG.

YOU, MR JENSEN
YES?
YOU'LL HAVE TIME - IT WILL BE STUNNED - BUT BE QUICK, JUST THE SAME.
AS QUICK AS YOU WERE ON THE FOOTBALL FIELD, ALL RIGHT?
YOU WANT ME TO MACE IT?
IT'S NOT MACE - THAT IS ILLEGAL WHERE I COME FROM - BUT THAT'S THE IDEA, YES. NOW I'D LIKE SILENCE, PLEASE.
WAIT A MINUTE
NOTHING UP MY SLEEVE, MISS KAT, I PROMISE YOU.
FINE.
HURRY UP THIS IS BAD
IT ALWAYS IS, BUT THE GODDAM STORMY WEATHER MAKES IT WORSE
ALL OF YOU, HUSH
FOR JESUS'S SAKE I PRAY

GOD, THERE IS AN EVIL OUTSIDER IN THIS MAN.
AN OUTSIDER FEEDING ON HIS FLESH AND BONES. HELP ME CAST IT OUT, AS YOUR SON CAST OUT THE DEMONS FROM THE POSSESSED MAN OF THE GADARENES.
HELP ME SPEAK TO THE LITTLE GREEN GOD OF AGONY INSIDE ANDREW NEWSOME IN YOUR OWN VOICE OF COMMAND.
COME OUT. COME OUT IN THE NAME OF JESUS.
COME OUT IN THE NAMES OF ALL THE SAINTS AND MARTYRS.
COME OUT IN THE NAME OF GOD, WHO GAVE YOU LEAVE TO ENTER AND NOW COMMANDS YOU TO LEAVE.
COME OUT INTO THE LIGHT.
LEAVE OFF YOUR MEAL AND COME OUT.
COME OUT IN THE NAME OF JESUS COME OUT IN THE NAMES OF THE SAINTS AND MARTYRS.
NO, DON'T GO DEEPER. YOU CAN'T HIDE, THING OF DARKNESS. COME OUT INTO THE LIGHT.
JESUS COMMANDS YOU THE SAINTS AND MARTYRS COMMAND YOU. GOD COMMANDS YOU TO LEAVE YOUR MEAL AND COME OUT.
LOOK!

THAT'S RIGHT.
COME OUT. COME OUT INTO THE LIGHT. YOU'VE DONE YOUR FEEDING, THING OF DARKNESS.
THE GOD THAT LET YOU IN COMMANDS YOU TO LEAVE. JESUS COMMANDS YOU TO LEAVE.
ALL THE SAINTS AND MARTYRS-
STOP!
HE'S HAVING A SEIZURE. YOU HAVE TO ST-
COME OUT!
COME OUT!

KRASH
SPRAY IT!
SPRAY IT BEFORE IT CAN GET AWAY!

DON'T LET IT GET ME!
I CAN'T SEE, DON'T LET IT GET ME!
WHERE AM I? I CAN'T SEE!
WHAT'S GOING ON? WHAT HAPPENED?
DON'T DO THAT!
AAAAAHHHH!!!

AYYYYYYMMMMMGGGGGRRRH!
HOLD STILL!
MELISSA, HOLD STILL!
IS IT GONE? KAT, IS IT GONE?
YES, IT'S GONE.
I FEEL BETTER.
CAN YOU SEE?
YES. IT'S BLURRY, BUT CLEARING.
KAT... THE PAIN...IT WAS ALL THROUGH ME. IT WAS LIKE THE END OF THE WORLD
SOMEBODY NEEDS TO FLUSH MY EYES!
HE'S DEAD. I GUESS HIS PAIN IS OVER.
KRAK
FUCK!
KAT?
FLUSH YOUR OWN EYES. YOU'VE GOT TWO GOOD LEGS, DON'T YOU?
I THINK I MIGHT, TOO, ONCE KAT THROWS THEM BACK INTO GEAR.
SOMEBODY CHECK ON RIDEOUT. I THINK THE POOR SONOFABITCH MIGHT BE DEAD
THE PAIN... KAT, YOU HAVE NO IDEA OF THE PAIN.
YES. ACTUALLY, I DO. NOW.
I PAID SEVENTY THOUSAND DOLLARS FOR THAT PIECE OF SHIT GENERATOR.
I NEED SOMEONE TO FLUSH MY EYES! KAT!
IT'S ON THE BACK OF MY HAND